

**Roll-Call Votes and Party Discipline in the European Parliament:
Reconsidering MEP Voting Behavior**

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Over the past ten years, possibly the most dramatic institutional development in the European Union (EU) has been the augmentation of the legislative powers of the European Parliament (EP). Until 1987 the EU legislative process required only that the EP be consulted before the Council of Ministers decided EU legislation. Since then the Single European Act, the Maastricht Treaty, and the Amsterdam Treaty have created and gradually expanded a more powerful legislative role for the EP. Indeed, for a broad range of policy areas, the EP can now exercise a legislative veto. Consequently, understanding the decisions of the EP on legislative proposals is crucial to explaining the legislative process and legislative outcomes in the EU. In particular, we need to understand the voting behavior of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

Why do MEPs vary in their votes on EU legislation? A growing literature on MEP voting behavior offers important insights. Several studies have described MEP voting behavior generally, focusing on roll-call votes. These studies have demonstrated systematic patterns in MEP voting and turnout based on Party Group affiliation, the legislative procedure, and the type of legislation (Tsebelis and Kreppel forthcoming; Kreppel 1998a; Brzinski, et. al. 1998; Scully 1997; Raunio 1996; Brzinski 1996; Attina 1990). In particular, this literature has focused on whether Party Groups--transnational coalitions of national party delegations--structure MEP voting behavior.

This is an interesting empirical question for at least two reasons. For one, if MEPs tend to vote consistently with their Party Groups--which are largely defined according to traditional left-right ideology, then EP legislative politics would be defined along similar lines to national politics. This is a descriptively interesting issue. However, that finding would say little concrete about what motivates MEPs or why they vary in

voting behavior. At best, it would indicate that MEPs tend to vote consistently with others from similar ideological partisan backgrounds.

Of greater importance is the issue of whether Party Groups effectively discipline MEP votes. If Party Group cohesion indicates that Party Groups can effectively enforce party discipline in EP votes, then Party Groups, rather than nationality or national partisanship, are the key political actors in EP legislative votes. This second issue is important for how we conceptualize EU legislative politics. An EP that is managed by transnational Party Groups alters the structure of representation in the EU by directly linking voters to EU policy. That is, rather than solely relying upon national governments (and the parties they represent) to provide indirect popular representation in the EU legislative process, an EP managed by transnational Party Groups would provide an alternative, more direct route. Consequently, although the level of Party Group cohesion is of general interest, its implications for the level of Party Group discipline on legislative votes are of particular theoretical importance.

Do Party Groups structure MEP legislative voting behavior? The findings of previous studies support a clear conclusion: MEPs, when they attend EP votes, vote largely with others of their Party Group. That is, Party Group cohesion is generally quite high.¹ There is, however, an important problem with drawing inferences about what motivates MEP voting behavior from this observed Party Group cohesion. The evidence of Party Group cohesion is based on roll-call votes (RCVs). RCVs provide a valuable

¹ Absences (and often abstentions) are generally ignored in the calculations of cohesion. This could be a problem since, when the EP actually can exercise influence in legislative process, it must decide by absolute majority. Under absolute majority, an absence is equivalent to a 'no' vote. In such cases, an absence undermines the goals of a Party Group in favor of the legislative proposal, and supports the interests of a

source of data, as they are the only regularly collected records of individual MEP votes. But studying RCVs to draw inferences about MEP legislative voting behavior is like inferring the amount of gang violence at night by observing well-lit street corners: the accuracy of observation may be high, but the observed behavior may not be representative. For one, a significant portion of RCVs concern non-legislative decisions--resolutions or procedural issues. It is difficult to say what we can learn about MEP legislative voting behavior from these non-legislative votes. Second, and more importantly, RCVs are likely to be strategically called in order to induce particular MEP behaviors. Consequently, the distribution of MEP votes on legislation may be far from representative of typical EP votes. In particular, Party Group *cohesion* in RCVs may be greater than in typical votes.

The reason for this potential problem is straightforward. Recall that one of the reasons to study RCVs is to assess the degree of party discipline in the EP. However, the decision to request a RCV and the level of party discipline are likely to be interdependent. RCVs are a crucial component of party discipline. It is extremely difficult for Party Groups to enforce or monitor MEP voting behavior if they cannot identify their members' behavior.² This implies that it is exactly when Party Groups can promote party cohesion through sanctions and rewards that they should request a RCV. In other words, the decision to request a RCV and the level of Party Group cohesion are likely to be correlated positively. Consequently, by focusing on RCVs we may be intentionally selecting those votes where Party Group cohesion is atypically high.

Party Group opposing the proposal. Thus, an absence is, in this sense, equivalent to a vote and could therefore be included in assessments of Party Group cohesion.

This selection bias poses a potentially fundamental problem for the study of EP legislative politics. But while most scholars acknowledge this issue, they uniformly ignore it in drawing inferences from RCVs about MEP behavior. For example, previous studies have used the evidence from RCVs to generate general theoretical models of MEP voting behavior and to describe patterns of MEP voting behavior across issues and legislative procedures. Due to evidence of high party group cohesion from RCVs, Kreppel (1998a: 218), assumed MEP preferences over policy to be those of their Party Group. Brzinski, et. al. (1998) concluded from a study of RCVs that national interests, even when clearly at stake, do not over-ride Party Group interests in shaping EP votes (Bay Brzinski, 1998).

But, if RCVs are unrepresentative--and particularly if they are likely to over-represent votes of high Party Group cohesion, then any inference to the population of all MEP legislative votes may be erroneous. In particular, we should be wary of inferring the motivations driving MEP's voting behavior from their RCVs. Consequently, before we can effectively use RCVs to describe and theorize about MEP legislative voting behavior, we need to identify how and under what conditions the decision to request a RCV will relate to particular patterns of MEP voting behavior. This is the focus our paper.

Since voting behavior on non-RCVs is impossible to observe, there is no inductive empirical research strategy that can identify how and whether patterns of MEP voting behavior on RCVs differ from patterns for non-RCV votes. Consequently, we cannot inductively address this question. Instead, we must use theory. To this end, we develop a formal model of the decision to request a RCV. From this model, we derive

² During the 1970s, Italian legislative parties had similar problems maintaining discipline due to the use of

insights regarding how RCVs relate to MEP voting behavior and we generate testable hypotheses.

In the first section of the paper we review the literature on roll-call votes in the European Parliament, paying particular attention to explanations for requesting a RCV. In the second section, we develop a formal model of the decision to request a RCV. Specifically, we draw on the growing literature on internal Party Group politics to model the strategic environment of intra-Party Group decision-making. Based on this model, we generate predictions identifying the conditions under which Party Groups will request a roll-call vote. These predictions allow us to assess: 1) whether and when RCVs should diverge from typical votes in terms of party group cohesion; 2) the micro-foundations for several claims as to why RCVs are requested; and 3) how calling RCVs affects policy outcomes. In the third section of the paper we discuss the empirical implications of this model.

Section I : The Decision to Call a Roll-Call Vote

The process of and motivation for calling a roll-call vote in the European Parliament have attracted little scholarly attention. To the best of our knowledge, scholars have described little about the process of calling a RCV beyond the formal rules. Formally, any Party Group or at least 29 MEPs can call a roll-call vote by written request. Party Groups request the vast majority of RCVs. About 15% of total votes in the EP are by roll-call.

Why do Party Groups request RCVs? Scholars identify several reasons. Corbett, Jacobs, and Shackleton (1995: 160) contend that Party Groups use RCVs to register their position publicly and to embarrass other groups by publicly revealing their position. Similarly, Tsebelis and Kreppel (forthcoming) claim that Party Groups use roll-calls to differentiate themselves from other groups. However, two other motivations are the most important. First, Party Group leaders use RCVs to control MEPs, as the RCV allows them to observe MEP behavior and enforce party discipline (Corbett, et. al., 1995: 160; Tsebelis and Kreppel forthcoming; Raiuno 1996: 117). Second, Party Group leaders use RCVs to assess the internal cohesion of their Party Group and learn the distribution of votes.

While suggestive, these accounts of roll-call votes lack sufficient detail to generate predictions about the conditions under which Party Groups will request RCVs. Specifically, these explanations beg important questions regarding the motivations of Party Group leaders or those who call RCVs. For example, Party Group leaders may be motivated to embarrass other Party Groups in order to improve their own electoral fortunes. If this is the case, then the proximity of the vote to a future national or European election date could influence requests for RCVs. Alternatively, Party Group leaders may want to embarrass another Party Group in order to attract away its newly elected members. If this is the case, then requests for RCVs might be highest immediately following a European Parliament Election. Obviously, the predictions would be very different depending on the causal model. More generally, without a causal theory, we cannot identify clear predictions about when or whether the different reasons for requesting a RCV will be relevant.

That said, the literature does inform the construction of a causal theory of RCV requests. Previous studies generally support two assumptions. First, the literature identifies agency. Party Group leaders request most RCVs. Second, one of the principle motivations of Party Group leaders in requesting RCVs is to influence policy outcomes, as best they can, via the legislative decisions of the EP. By setting a party position on a vote (i.e. through a whip), and calling a RCV to put individual member's votes on record, Party Group leaders can try to enforce party discipline and thereby achieve the leadership's more preferred outcomes.

In sum, the existing literature provides the framework for constructing a formal model of requests for roll-call votes in the European Parliament. Party Group leaders request RCVs in order to further policy-goals, either because they value policy as an end in itself or because it has instrumental value for electoral goals. Of course, since leaders of different Party Groups may have competing policy, their requests for RCVs may be strategic. In the following section, we use these insights from the existing literature to inform a formal model of requests for RCVs.

II. A Theory of Roll-Call Vote Request

To examine how strategic considerations concerning the request of RCVs relate to patterns of MEP voting behavior, we develop a formal model of the decision to request a RCV.³ The *Roll-call Vote Game* involves three actors: MEPs, Party Group leaders, and

³ As discussed above, some RCVs may be called for non-strategic reasons. For example, party groups may request RCVs to take a public position on an issue or to assess policy positions of various MEPs. While these possibilities are interesting, and clearly deserve attention in any empirical analysis, the decision over whether to request a roll-call for these reasons is more decision-theoretic than strategic. And thus, the utility of formally modeling those scenarios is much more limited.

national delegation leaders. National delegation leaders are simply the heads of each Party Group's national delegations. Within the European Socialist Party Group, for example, there are national delegations from the French Socialist Party and the German Social Democratic Party. The Party Group leadership consists of MEPs elected by the Party Group as a whole. We assume there is a finite number of MEPs (that is greater than one) and that each MEP can only belong to one Party Group and one national delegation. We impose no further restrictions on the number of MEPs, Party Groups or national delegations. Our model is therefore applicable to an EP with varying numbers of Party Groups, national delegations, and MEPs.

a. Actors and Goals:

We assume these actors seek to influence policy. Specifically, they have preferences over a single spatial policy dimension.⁴ Each actor is represented on this dimension by her ideal point and we assume she has Euclidean preferences on this policy dimension--i.e., an MEP's utility from a policy decreases with the distance between her ideal point and the proposed policy.

We assume that each national delegation leader represents the median voter of her national party delegation. This assumption rests on the expectation that MEPs, when nominating a national delegation leader, are unsure of exactly how the legislative process will play out over the next year. As such, it is unlikely there would be strategic voting in the nomination process. Without any incentive to vote strategically, majority rule would yield the national delegation's median preference

The Party Group leadership is more difficult to define. In one sense, the Party Group leadership consists of national delegation leaders. However, in another sense, the Party Group leadership is independent, elected by the Party Group as a whole. Thus, we assume, similar to the national delegation leaders, that the Party Group leaders represent the median voter in their Party Groups.

We assume that MEPs, Party Group leaders, and national party delegation leaders all care about influencing policy. The most obvious way to do that on a legislative vote is through their individual votes. However, MEPs can also influence policy through their position on influential committees and other leadership positions within their Party Groups.⁵ These positions are distributed by the Party Groups, but national delegation leaders often have a strong influence on the final distribution (Kreppel 1998b). Thus, MEPs care not only about the intrinsic value of the policy (i.e., how far the policy adopted by the EP diverges from the MEP's ideal point) but how the leadership will view that vote (Carrubba and Gabel 1998; Gabel and Hix 1998). That is, the vote choice is instrumentally valuable to the MEP, as it may prove costly or beneficial to her pursuit of policy influence more generally. The utility function that characterizes these preferences is stated below:

$$U_j = f(x, I_j) - C_{pg} - C_{nd}$$

⁴ Actually, the model can be generalized to an n-dimensional space, but for ease of exposition we focus on the one-dimensional case.

⁵ For example, having committee positions can influence what proposals and amendments are reported to the floor for consideration. We do not endogenize bill proposal in our model, rather it is simply assumed that members value committee positions.

where x is the policy under consideration, I_j is the MEP's ideal point, C_{pg} is the cost that can be imposed by the Party Group of which the MEP is a member and C_{nd} is the cost that can be imposed by the national delegation of which the MEP is a member. A MEP's utility is assumed to be decreasing in the distance between the MEP's ideal policy and the actual policy passed and additively decreasing in the costs that can be imposed by the MEP's Party Group leader and by the MEP's national delegation leader.

Similar to the MEPs, we assume leaders of Party Groups and national party delegations care about policy and some set of additional costs. However, here the costs are not of being sanctioned, the leaders already are the power brokers, but rather of wielding that power. First, we assume that there is some--albeit very small--cost involved in making a RCV request. This cost may involve identifying and organizing the twenty-nine supporters, the time lost in making the request, and/or the disgruntlement that MEPs will express to their leaders for forcing them to travel to the EP to cast a vote. Second, the leaders also must pay a cost to sanction their members. Any "carrot"--a promised promotion or perk--is finite and its use precludes offering it to someone else or at a later stage. Any "stick"--such as removing an MEP from a committee assignment--involves costs in implementation (such as replacement). Thus, the utility function is as follows:

$$U_l = f(x, I_l) - C_{rcv} - C_{sanction}$$

where x is the policy under consideration, I_l is the leader's ideal point, C_{rcv} is the cost of requesting a roll-call, and $C_{sanction}$ is the total cost of imposing sanctions on Party Group members, summed across MEPs.

b. The Game Form:

The sequence of the *RCV Game* is depicted in Figure 1. First, nature places a pair of exogenously specified alternatives on the docket. This pair of alternatives can be anything, two possible amendments to a bill that are going head-to-head, an amended version of a Commission proposal versus an unamended version, or a final version of a Commission proposal that is to be voted up or down (i.e. versus the status quo).

Once the docket is set, Party Group leaders and national party delegation leaders can “whip” their constituent MEPs.⁶ Formally, “whip” means telling MEPs to vote for the legislative alternative that the leadership prefers. A sanction (C in the MEP utility function) for non-compliance is implicitly or explicitly attached to this request. For example, the Socialist Party Group leader can threaten sanctions against “back-bench” Socialist MEPs that vote contrary to a whipped position. These sanctions could entail anything from a threat of not getting or keeping a valuable committee position, to the expectation that the defecting MEP will not get future desired legislation passed.⁷

National party delegation leaders can also sanction their members. National party delegation leaders have control over the distribution of institutional resources (e.g., committee chairs) within the delegation (Kreppel 1998b). Also, national parties largely control ballot access. Thus, national party delegation leaders, through their national party structure, can threaten their MEPs with electoral penalties (Corbett, et. al. 1995: 92). Note that while we are not explicitly modeling this game in a repeated setting, we assume that reputation makes these threats and promises credible.

⁶ See Corbett, et. al. (1995: 92) for discussion of “whipping” in the EP.

⁷ Of course, rather than sanctioning, the leadership could offer a carrot by suggesting that the MEP will be rewarded with a future committee position or desired amendment to a piece of legislation instead.

Of course, different leaders have different resources through which to sanction MEP behavior. For example, the Socialist Party Group will have more and better committee chairs to assign than the Green Party Group. To allow for this possibility, the cost a MEP pays for ignoring the whip is an indexed term C_i , where i indicates the Party Group or national delegation within a Party Group that is threatening the sanction.

At this stage in the game, a roll-call vote may be requested. A request requires the formal support of at least twenty-nine MEPs, or a Party Group. In the absence of a request, the vote is made by electronic means, a show of hands, or some other unrecorded means. Thus, if the vote is by roll-call it becomes common knowledge how each MEP voted, while if the vote is by any other means individual votes can only be deduced indirectly. This is important, as the roll-call provides the only means by which a Party Group leader can monitor her MEPs' behavior.

Only Party Group leadership or national party delegation leaders may call RCVs. This assumption is made because we are interested in modeling the conditions under which RCVs will be used to influence policy outcomes and does not affect the conditions under which our model will predict RCVs. Whenever a group of twenty-nine MEPs want to call a RCV, at least one Party Group or national delegation leader will want to call one.

Note that, because we assume that there is some--albeit very small--cost involved in a request, leaders will need to expect some policy benefit from calling a RCV in order to off-set the cost of the request. For this reason, the decision to whip and the decision to request a RCV are interdependent. Leaders who whip their members will request RCVs and leaders who do not whip their members will not request RCVs. In the case where the leader does not whip, there is no added policy gain from calling the RCV—i.e., no gain

from monitoring voting behavior. Thus, the costs of requesting the RCV outweigh the benefits and no RCV is requested.

Similarly, a leader derives little or no value from whipping her MEPs if she cannot then monitor their behavior through a RCV. It is much easier to sanction a MEP on a roll-call than otherwise. A RCV allows the leader to point to the offending vote and assign a punishment. A non-RCV forces the leader to backwards induce how each MEP voted and then assign punishment. While leaders do backwards induce all voting behavior in this model, if we allowed a leader to think that there is some small chance of punishing the wrong person when backwards inducing, that leader would strictly prefer to call a RCV before threatening sanctions. Consequently, the leader's decision to whip his constituent MEPs will always be paired with a request for a RCV.

Once the leader decides whether or not to request a roll-call, the MEPs' votes are cast and the outcome is determined by majority rule. As mentioned above, each MEP's decision on how to vote is based upon two factors, his preferences over the two alternative pieces of legislation and the rewards and punishments that his leaders can impose. This utility function makes the MEPs vote choice quite simple. When sanctions are not threatened the MEP will vote for his most preferred policy.⁸ When sanctions are threatened the MEP must decide whether to switch to the other alternative. The MEP only switches if the loss of utility from switching policies is less than the net amount of sanctions avoided. Note that we say net because the MEP's Party Group leader might want her to vote one way, while the MEP's national delegation leader might want her to vote the other.

⁸ We assume that MEPs vote sincerely, based on their policy positions.

c. Solving the Game

Deriving general results for this game is complicated by the wide variety of possible distributions of MEP preferences within and across Party Groups and national delegations. Thus, in order to characterize the behavior of Party Group and national delegation leaders and MEPs, we must first introduce and define some terms.

An individual is said to prefer one policy, p_0 , to the alternative, p_a , if $|p_0 - I_i| < |p_a - I_i|$. That is, the MEP prefers the policy closer to her ideal point. A chamber is said to prefer p_0 to p_a if $\sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i}{N} > .5$ where ind_i is an indicator variable that, for each MEP, equals 1 iff $|p_0 - I_i| < |p_a - I_i|$. Since $\sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i}{N} > .5$ iff $ind_m = 1$, where m is the chamber median. We can say the chamber prefers the policy p_0 if the chamber median prefers the policy.

An MEP is said to be *disciplined* when a Party Group leader's (PGL's) threat of sanctions causes a party group member (PGM) to vote for a policy that the member would otherwise oppose. Assuming for the moment that national delegation leaders cannot impose sanctions, Party Group discipline occurs when $|p_0 - I_i| < |p_a - I_i|$, but $U_i(p_a, c_{pg}) > U_i(p_0, c_{pg})$, where p_a is the policy voted for by MEP i , and c_{pg} is the sanctioning behavior given the policy voted for by MEP i . Thus, due to sanctions, the MEP derives greater utility from voting for the policy further from her ideal point. When national delegation leaders can sanction PGM i , PGL discipline occurs when

$|p_0 - I_i| < |p_a - I_i|$ and $U_i(p_a, c_{pg} = 0, c_{nd}) < U_i(p_0, c_{pg} = 0, c_{nd})$, but

$U_i(p_a, c_{pg}, c_{nd}) > U_i(p_0, c_{pg}, c_{nd})$, where c_{nd} is the sanctioning behavior by the national delegation leader of MEP i given the policy voted for by MEP i and the sanctioning behavior of MEP i 's PGL.

Party Group or national delegation leader k is said to have *swung a vote* when

$$(1) \sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i^{c_{j*k}}}{N} > .5,$$

where $ind_i^{c_{j*k}}$ is an indicator variable that equals 1 when an MEP votes for alternative p_a , given that all party group and national delegation leaders but k who wish to impose discipline do so, and

$$(2) \sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i^c}{N} < .5,$$

where ind_i^c is an indicator variable that equals 1 when an MEP votes for p_a , given that all party group and national delegation leaders, including k , who wish to impose discipline do so. Put simply, these equations state that a leader has swung a vote when, by imposing sanctions on his members, he changes the outcome of the vote (holding the behavior of all other leaders constant).

Using these definitions, when will a leader of a Party Group or a national delegation request a RCV? The somewhat banal answer is: 1) the leader must want to call a RCV in order to influence the legislative outcome; and 2) the leader must be able to swing the vote by calling a RCV. Formally, a leader k will request a RCV when

$$U_k(p_a) > U_k(p_0), \sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i^{c_{j*k}}}{N} > .5, \text{ and } \sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i^c}{N} < .5. \text{ We also learn something from this}$$

about the character of non-RCVs, which we will discuss later in the paper. For now, note that if either the leader expects to win without having to impose sanctions or the leader expects to lose even with imposing sanctions, she will not request a RCV.

For ease of exposition we will focus on Party Groups and their leaders for the rest of this discussion. National delegations and their leaders will be referred to explicitly only where additional insights can be gained. Also, we will focus our discussion by referring to PGLs according to whether they are on the majority- or minority-side of the vote. A PGL is defined as being on the majority-side if he prefers the policy that wins when all Party Groups exert perfect Party Group discipline. Conversely, a PGL is defined as being on the minority-side if he/she prefers the policy that loses when all Party Groups exert perfect Party Group discipline. For convenience, we assume that the Party Groups on the right are the majority side and the Party Groups on the left are the minority side.

By analyzing the strategic situation in terms of minority and majority-side Party Groups it is natural to think about this setting as a two Party Group system. That is, since each of the PGLs on the majority-side will want the same bill passed and each of the PGLs on the minority-side will want the alternative bill passed, all of the Party Groups on the majority-side can be thought of as the *majority coalition* and all of the Party Groups on the minority-side can be thought of as the *minority coalition*. Although this simplification may seem dramatic, all it really does is treat each sides' PGLs as unitary actors. The only strategic dynamic that this simplification eliminates is a potential coordination problem among one side's PGLs.⁹

⁹ For example, if a side knows it needs to attract one more vote to win, one of two PGLs can threaten the necessary sanctions to get that vote, but if doing so is at all costly, then each wants the other to pay the price

With this framework in place, we can now explore the connection between roll-call votes, MEP voting behavior, and legislative outcomes. First, under what conditions can a PGL swing a vote by calling a RCV? The answer depends on two things: whether the PGL is minority or majority-side and the distribution of MEP ideal points. When MEP ideal points within Party Groups are concentrated, such that no member of a Party Group has an ideal point immediately between members of another Party Group(s), we call the distribution *non-overlapping*. That is, the ideal points of all members of a Party Group adjoin each other. When MEPs have ideal points that are not concentrated in this way, we call the distribution *overlapping*. That is, when at least one minority PGM is to the right of the median (recall that we are assuming the minority coalition is to the left). Figure 2 depicts overlapping and non-overlapping preference distributions.

c. 1. Non-Overlapping MEP Preferences

When preferences are non-overlapping, only the majority PGL can swing a vote.

The majority PGL swings the vote iff $\sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i^{c_{Maj}}}{N} < .5$ where c_{Maj} indicates that the majority

coalition threatens sanctions (independent of any other sanctioning behavior). There are three observations to make from this solution. First, whether the minority coalition

and attract the vote. However, as long as the cost of sanctioning is less than the benefit gained by winning the vote, Nash equilibria exist in which either one or the other threatens sanctions.

This coordination issue would only have a significant impact on observable cohesion if the majority side was much larger than the minority side and a significant percent of at least two of the majority side Party Groups (approaching fifty percent of each) opposed their Party Group's position. Then we would expect to see a significant lack of cohesion on the majority side. However, under these conditions our model predicts the same lack of cohesion with or without the coordination problem modeled. Thus, this unneeded complexity is omitted.

disciplines its members or not is irrelevant. The minority PGL cannot affect the majority PGL's ability to win the vote because preferences are non-overlapping. Even if the minority PGL can ensure perfect discipline, it will not be sufficient to swing the vote.

Second, the majority PGL only needs to threaten sanctions if the median voter prefers the alternative policy, otherwise the policy preferred by the majority would pass without calling a RCV. Third, the majority party will display perfect cohesion if it has a bare majority of the chamber. And, because threatening sanctions against each additional member is individually costly, cohesion will decrease by one for each majority MEP to the far side of the median. That is, where the majority has surplus MEPs, the majority PGL will not pay to constrain their votes and we will see less than perfect cohesion. In sum, the majority coalition's destiny is in its own hands when preferences are non-overlapping, and majority coalition cohesion should be high. The majority party should only experience defections to the degree that it has surplus votes and chooses not to threaten sanctions against those votes.

c. 2. Overlapping MEP preferences

When preferences are overlapping, either coalition can swing votes under the right conditions. For the majority coalition, a PGL can swing the vote if $\sum_{i=1}^N \frac{ind_i^c}{N} < .5$. That is, a majority PGL can swing a vote when the total number of majority MEPs who vote for the majority PGL's position plus the number of undisciplined minority PGMs who vote for the majority PGL's position is at least minimum winning.

Again there are three observations to make about this simple solution. First, it is now possible for the minority coalition to influence outcomes. If the majority PGL cannot ensure discipline from enough of its members to gain a bare majority, and the minority PGL can enforce enough discipline that the majority coalition cannot pick up the needed extra votes from minority coalition MEPs, then the minority PGL can foil the majority coalition. Of course, if the majority PGL can ensure enough discipline to have a bare majority without any minority coalition votes, then the minority coalition is still out of luck.

Second, the majority coalition might have to threaten sanctions even if the chamber median prefers the majority PGL's preferred bill. If minority MEPs have most preferred bills on the far side of the median from the minority PGL, and the PGL can discipline any of those PGMs, then the majority coalition would have to have the support of at least one member to the left of the median. If that MEP (or MEPs) does not want the PGL's bill, discipline would have to be imposed. One significant implication of this finding is that, unlike in many legislative settings, only under special circumstances can one characterize chamber preferences by the preferences of the chamber median. This is particularly relevant for models of institutional bargaining in the EU, where the EP's position is assumed to be the chamber median.

Third, the more Party Group members' ideal points overlap, the greater the opportunities for low Party Group cohesion. To the degree that disciplining members is costly to the majority PGL, and to the degree that the minority PGL cannot discipline its own members, then the PGL calling the RCV may choose to allow some of its members to defect because it is costless to rely upon the minority coalition's undisciplined

members to win the vote. That is, the greater the overlap, the more votes from the minority coalition the PGL might be able to rely upon.

These conditions for the majority coalition PGL to swing a vote generally apply to the PGLs of the minority coalition. The important difference is that the minority coalition must rely upon some majority coalition votes to win. Thus, if the majority PGL can ensure sufficient cohesion, the minority PGL cannot swing a vote.

III. Empirical Implications

Four empirical questions can be answered using the analysis from the last section: 1) who should we expect to see win RCVs; 2) when should we expect RCVs to display low cohesion; 3) how often should we expect to see RCVs display low cohesion; 4) when should we expect to see “embarrassment votes called; and 5) how representative should we expect RCVs to be of the universe of votes. Each of these issues are considered in turn.

The first question is trivial, Party Groups that call RCVs should win. Because we assume that RCV requests are used to make sanctioning threats credible, sanctioning is only beneficial if the PGL successfully swings the vote, and there is perfect information so that everyone will know how RCVs and non-RCVs will turn out, a PGL should never call a RCV unless the leader will win the vote as a result. Of course, since the world is not one of perfect information, occasionally PGLs are going to make mistakes and call votes that they will lose. Thus, more realistically, our model would predict that Party Groups that call RCVs should almost always win.

The question of when RCVs should display low cohesion is somewhat more complex. When preferences are non-overlapping there should always be fairly high cohesion. The majority coalition is calling the RCV to swing a few recalcitrant members and may have some surplus votes or not, the minority coalition should all vote against the bill. When preferences are overlapping the answer depends upon the degree to which they are overlapping. If the minority and majority coalitions only overlap a little, it should look much like the non-overlapping case, perhaps with a few minority coalition votes breaking ranks as well. However, if the coalitions overlap significantly we can have quite low cohesion, with numerous defectors from both sides.

When are preferences likely to overlap significantly? When preferences are ordered nationally rather than ideologically. For example, if the issue being voted on involves the distribution of the EU budget, as opposed to competition worker protection, MEPs are more likely to have preferences based upon their country of origin than whether they are leftist or not. Thus, low Party Group cohesion is more likely when the issues being decided involves nationally, rather than ideologically, ordered MEP preferences.

Note that while Party Groups are more likely to display low cohesion when preferences are nationally ordered, we should not expect to see this low cohesion displayed very often. Rather, we should expect such issues to be resolved in non-RCVs. Why? Simply put, it will always be more difficult for a PGL to successfully swing a vote when preferences are nationally ordered. Recall that there are in fact two sets of leaders who have sanctioning power in the EP, the Party Group leaders and the national delegation leaders. When preferences are ideologically ordered, a Party Group's national delegation leaders will tend to have the same preferences as the PGL. However, when

preferences are nationally ordered, and a PGL wants to swing a vote, he/she will always have to swing that vote against the wishes of at least one national delegation leader.¹⁰ Obviously it is less likely that a PGL will have sufficient sanctioning power to swing a vote when national delegation leaders are using their sanctioning power against the position of the PGL rather than in concert. Thus, while low cohesion should occasionally be observed, the difficulty of overcoming national delegation resistance should make it rare.

Interestingly, low cohesion votes are most likely when the PGL requesting the RCV wins, not because he/she successfully sanctions enough of his/her party to have a bare majority, but because the opposition fails to maintain its own discipline. When this event happens, and particularly when the minority PGL requesting the RCV, such votes will look like embarrassment votes. Of course, according to our model the motivation for such a vote would not be to embarrass the other Party Group, but simply to win the vote. Thus, in answering the fourth question, we can say that what appear to be embarrassment votes are more likely to occur when preferences are nationally ordered, and disciplining is weak.

Given what RCVs will look like, we can address the central question of this paper: how representative do we expect them to be? That is, will RCVs tend to display the same level of cohesion that non-RCVs display? The short answer is no, or at least not under reasonable conditions. Instead, RCVs should systematically display higher levels of cohesion than non-RCVs because the decision to call a RCV is a strategic one.

¹⁰ We assume here that at least a majority of MEPs from a national delegation do not share the preferences of the PGL over the two alternatives.

To see this, note that the likelihood of a RCV depends upon the heterogeneity, or diversity, of Party Group members' preferences. When preferences are highly homogenous among a Party Groups' members, a PGL will rarely be able to use a RCV to swing a vote. This is because Party Group members will mostly be voting the way the PGLs want them to, without sanctions. In other words, each Party Group's ideal points will be tightly packed around the group mean and so almost all PGMs will prefer the same policies as the PGMs. Under such a homogenous distribution of Party Group members' preferences, we would not expect to observe RCVs.

Similarly, when Party Group members' preferences are very heterogeneous, a PGL will rarely be able to use a RCV to swing a vote. For any pair of alternatives that a member and his leader have different preferences over, the cost to the leader of disciplining the member increases with the distance between their ideal points. Thus, at high levels of heterogeneity, a RCV is of little value to a Party Group leader.

This implies that non-RCVs would be characterized by both highly homogenous and highly heterogeneous distributions of preferences within Party Groups. However, the level of Party Group cohesion would be very different on votes under these two types of distributions: high cohesion under homogeneity, low cohesion under heterogeneity. Thus, to be representative of non-RCVs, MEP voting behavior on RCVs would need to be consistent with the cohesion based on the distributions.

For what distribution of preferences should we see RCVs requested? Only when preferences are moderately heterogeneous would we expect to see many RCVs. Under these conditions some disciplining is necessary because either the majority or the minority coalition sees the opportunity to swing the vote and preferences are not so

dispersed with Party Groups that the PGLs cannot successfully do so. Thus, we should expect to see RCVs on ideological issues in which parties have non- or somewhat-overlapping preferences and not see RCVs on national or highly overlapping issues. And, as discussed above, we should expect to see generally high levels of cohesion (particularly within the Party Group requesting the RCV) on these RCVs.

These conclusions cast serious doubt on the accuracy of RCVs as indicative of legislative votes in the EP. For the generally high levels of Party Group cohesion for RCVs to be representative of all votes, the non-RCVs would need to be of a particular character: ideologically homogeneous. That is, the issues decided by non-RCV must be those on which Party Group cohesion is attained without sanctioning. How realistic is this assumption? Well, it would require that the vast majority of EP votes (85% of votes are by non-RCV), ranging across a broad set of policy areas, are homogenous. This seems highly unlikely. Furthermore, not only are RCVs unrepresentative, but the direction of bias is certainly toward higher cohesion. That is RCVs *overestimate* the level of Party Group cohesion on legislative votes.

What is the magnitude of this bias? Without systematic data on non-RCV preference distributions, it is impossible to say. However, the model provides some guidance in assessing the bias. The key issue is the number of non-RCVs that are homogeneously distributed relative to the number that are heterogeneously distributed. The greater the former, the less the bias. To the extent we can infer the ratio of these two distributions--from the policy area considered, for example--we can estimate the extent of that bias.

What about Party Discipline--is the level of Party Group cohesion on RCVs representative of the level of Party Group discipline on legislative votes in general? To address this question, we first need to distinguish Party Group discipline from Party Group cohesion. By Party Group discipline we mean that Party Group leadership induces its MEPs to vote for the leader's preferred policy, even though some MEPs' might prefer the alternative policy. Thus, the level of Party Group discipline is continuous and is indicated by the level of utility (in policy distance multiplied by the number of MEPs) a leader can induce MEPs to forgo due to threat of sanctioning.

According to our model, a Party Group leader who has sufficient sanctioning power to enforce Party Group discipline and stands to gain from enforcing this discipline will always call a RCV. This means that, if a Party Group leader requests a RCV and we observe high Party Group cohesion, then that Party Group is demonstrating Party Group discipline. To assess the level of discipline, however, requires information about the ideal points of the Party Group leader and the MEPs, as well as the position of the alternatives. Lacking such data, we can only claim there is discipline, but we cannot differentiate among votes in terms of the extent of discipline. Note also that we are not claiming that all Party Group cohesion on RCVs represents party discipline. A Party Group that does not request the RCV may show high cohesion on a RCV simply because its MEPs share preferences over legislative outcomes.

How can we use this information to assess the level of Party Group discipline on EP votes in general? The main question here is whether Party Group leaders fail to call RCVs because their MEPs share their preferences (i.e., PG homogeneity) or because they lack sufficient sanctioning power to induce cohesion (i.e., PG heterogeneity). If non-

RCVs all indicate homogeneity, then high cohesion by the requesting Party Group on RCVs would indicate that Party Group discipline is very high. In this case, non-RCVs would be irrelevant to assessing party discipline. However, if the heterogeneity characterizes some non-RCVs, then we would be over-estimating the level of Party Group discipline by focusing only on MEP voting behavior on RCVs. Under this condition, we would not observe cases of Party Group leaders failing to discipline their members. And the more often the latter condition holds for non-RCVs, the more egregious the over-estimation of Party Group discipline. Thus, unless one is willing to assume a very particular distribution of preferences for non-RCVs, Party Group discipline is over-estimated by measures of cohesion on RCVs.

In sum, we cannot assume that MEP voting behavior in RCVs is representative of MEP voting behavior in general. The answer to the question depends upon a number of currently unmeasured parameters such as the distribution of preferences, leadership sanctioning power, and the relative positions of the policy alternatives under consideration. Thus, while RCVs may be representative, it would be a gross simplification to assume they are. Fortunately, this model helps identify the conditions under which RCVs would be representative, and thereby provides the ability, once the empirical resources are gathered, to address this question. In the following section we provide some preliminary evidence regarding some of the empirical implications of the model.

IV. Empirical Evidence

Many of the empirical implications of our model are difficult to test with currently collected data. Obviously, we would like data on MEP preferences on legislative proposals, both on RCVs and non-RCVs. However, some existing data suffice for testing, in a general way, some of the implications of the model. Below, we present results from analysis of such data. We have not collected a large, randomly selected set of votes, due to resource constraints. Thus, our empirical findings should be considered preliminary.

a. Data:

Recall that one of the primary motivations for studying roll-call voting behavior in the European Parliament is to learn about the legislative process in the European Union. Thus, while chamber resolutions, and other on-legislative votes, might well be interesting in their own right, including them in an empirical analysis here would only have potentially confounding affects upon our findings. This problem is particularly significant because non-legislative votes are such a large portion of RCVs. Note that many studies of RCV voting behavior have analyzed all RCVs, which include votes on resolutions and internal institutional decisions.

We will analyze only final votes on legislative proposals. It is important to note that among legislative votes, some votes are on final legislative decisions and others are on amendments. In one sense, these are all legislative votes, as they pertain to legislative proposals. However, as our model illustrates, the context of a particular legislative issue may be more amenable to RCVs than others. For example, the distribution of preferences may be conducive to discipline. As a result, RCVs on different versions of the same

legislative proposal are not independent. Thus, we would like to control for the legislative proposal on which the vote was based. A simple way to avoid this problem is to focus only on the final vote on a proposal, which we adopt here.

b. Results

With these two concerns in mind, we collected RCV data from sixteen sessions of the European Parliament, between March 1997 and December 1998. The data were collected from the *Official Journal of the European Communities, Series C*.¹¹ In these sessions, there were 725 final votes, 308 of which were legislative votes. Of these 308 votes, only 32 were decided by roll-call--about 10 %. It is also interesting to note that 121 of the 725 final votes were by roll-call, so obviously the vast majority of roll-call votes were on resolutions, not legislation. If this is typical of RCV data, it indicates that we should be cautious in drawing inferences about legislative voting behavior from patterns of behavior on RCVs as a whole.

Turning to the theoretical implications, we first examine whether legislation voted under RCVs is won by the requesting agent. The evidence suggests that indeed RCVs are predominantly called by the winning side. In the 32 RCVs, 28 (88%) were requested by a winning Party Group.¹² Occasionally, more than one Party Group called a RCV. In some of these cases the Party Groups took opposing positions. Consequently, we also want to consider all RCV requests. The total number of RCV requests was 39, and the

¹¹ Due to missing volumes, we only collected data for the following sessions (week of): 3/10/97; 4/7/97; 7/14/97; 9/15/97; 11/17/97; 3/30/98; 5/11/98; 5/27/98; 6/15/98; 7/1/98; 7/13/98; 9/14/98; 10/5/98; 11/4/98; 12/14/98.

¹² Interestingly, all RCVs were decided in favor of the proposal.

number of RCV requests made by an eventual winning Party Group was 33 (85%).¹³

Again, Party Groups that request RCVs typically win them.

Second, we expect Party Group cohesion on RCVs to be generally high for Party Groups that call RCVs. Our evidence is consistent with this expectation. Table 1 presents cohesion scores (the percentage of MEPs voting with their Party Group majority position)¹⁴ for each Party Group requesting a RCV. For the vast majority of RCVs, the level of Party Group cohesion is 0.94 or above.

Table 1. Party Group Cohesion on Roll-call Votes They Request

Party Group	Number RCVs	Average Cohesion	Standard Deviation
PSE	3	0.98	0.02
PPE	19	0.94	0.08
UPE	2	0.95	0.04
ELDR	1	1.00	-
GUE	3	0.79	0.15
GREENS	7	1.00	0
ARE	2	1.00	0
I-EDN	2	0.58	0.39
Total	39	0.93	0.13

One final implication of our model is worth noting. In summarizing the results, we have ignored the possibility that national delegation leaders request a RCV. The reason for this omission is that national party delegation leaders, even when they have sanctioning power, will generally not request RCVs. Any time a national delegation leader might want to make a request there will always be at least one Party Group leader who will want to make the same request. This theoretical implication is consistent with

¹³ Five of the six RCVs requested by a losing Party Group were called by very small Party Groups: the Greens (2), Europe of Nations (2), and European Radical Alliance.

¹⁴ We adopt the convention that abstentions and absences are not counted in the cohesion score. However, as discussed earlier, one could consider absences and abstentions as votes against the proposal.

the observed behavior of national delegation leaders. Previous research has found that the vast majority of RCVs are requested by Party Group leaders, as were all of the votes in our sample.

V. Conclusion

Given the ascendance of the European Parliament in the EU legislative process over the last ten years, legislative voting behavior in the EP is an increasingly important aspect of EU legislative politics. Consequently, to understand EU legislative politics, we need to understand why MEPs vary in their voting behavior. In particular, we need to understand the impact of Party Groups, as they provide a potentially important constraint on the voting behavior of their member MEPs.

A common approach to addressing these questions is to empirically investigate MEP voting behavior on roll-call votes (RCVs). RCVs are an invaluable source of information about MEP voting behavior, since they are the only systematically collected data. However, before drawing inferences about voting behavior from RCVs, we should think carefully about whether RCVs are representative of legislative votes. This is a particularly important concern since RCVs have strategic value to Party Group leaders. RCVs allow Party Group leaders to observe their members' voting behavior, which is crucial for enforcing discipline in order to promote Party Group cohesion. Consequently, RCVs may provide a biased view of MEP voting behavior.

In this paper, we have attempted to address whether and how RCVs are representative of MEP legislative votes. We developed a formal model of the decision to request a RCV, which provides a framework to assess the bias in RCVs. The principle

result is that RCVs are only representative in terms of Party Group cohesion and Party Group discipline for very specific conditions regarding the distribution of MEP preferences within and across Party Groups. Indeed, there is no *ex ante* reason to believe such a fortuitous coincidence of conditions exist. Under realistic conditions, RCVs will be biased toward higher levels of Party Group cohesion and discipline than are characteristic of the universe of legislative votes.

Of course, the extent to which these conclusions are accurate depends on the validity of our formal model. Consequently, we would like to test the empirical veracity of its empirical implications. Although we lack sufficient data to provide rigorous tests of the model, we have provided some suggestive evidence that is consistent with the predictions of the model.

While these results appear pessimistic regarding the value of RCVs for studying MEP legislative voting behavior, we want to end the paper on an optimistic note. Knowledge of the process by which the data are generated can help inform analysis that avoids, or at least attenuates, the bias inherent in the data. In particular, through the use of a selection bias model, we can model both the RCV request decision and the vote decision of the MEP. Specifically, the selection bias model first estimates the decision by a Party Group leader to call a RCV for a particular piece of legislation. Thus, at that stage we would consider all legislation under consideration (which is reported regularly by the EU). Ideally, we would be able to acquire sufficient information about the legislation under consideration (e.g., the policy area) to specify an appropriate model of this decision. We would then model the level of cohesion for each Party Group, but correct

for any correlation of errors between the two models, thereby eliminating bias (Timpone 1998).

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Figure 1. The Roll-Call Vote Game

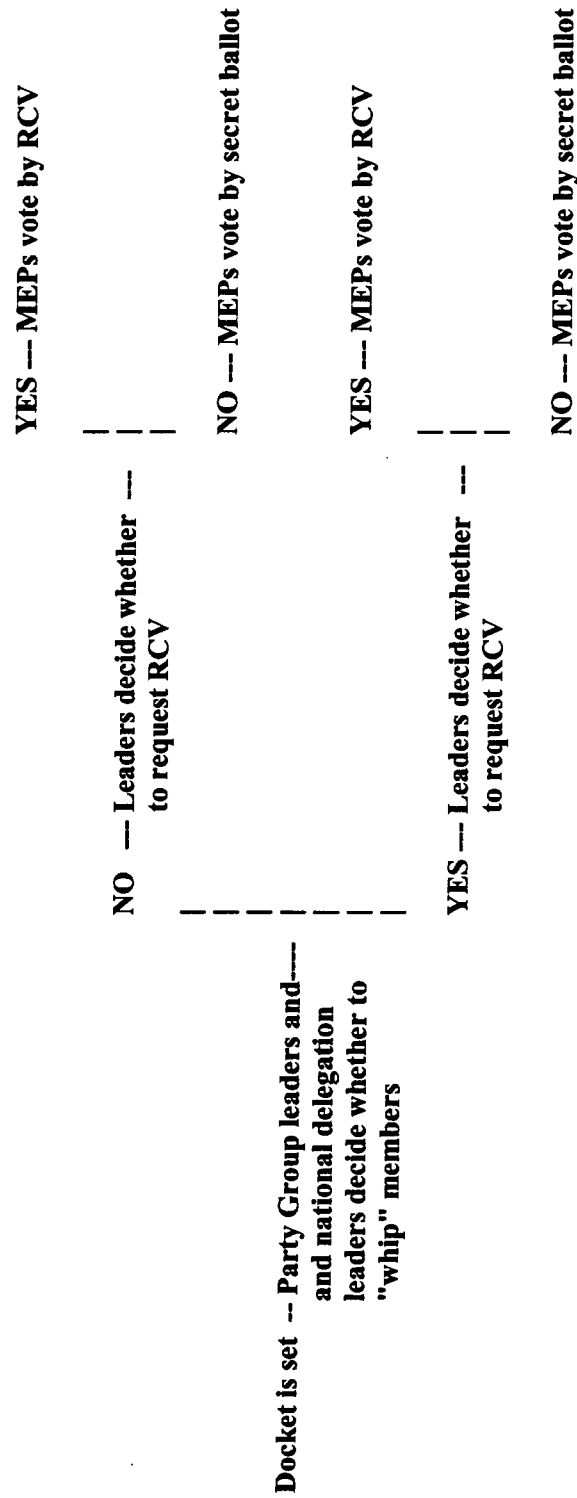


Figure 2. Overlapping and Non-Overlapping Preferences

X- Member of Party Group 1
Y- Member of Party Group 2

Non-Overlapping Ideal Points of Members of Two Party Groups:

Left _____ *XXXXXX* _____ *YYYY* _____ *Right*

Overlapping Ideal Points of Members of Two Party Groups

Left _____ *XXYYXXYYXX* _____ *YYXXYY* _____ *Right*